





National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

PRINCE WILLIAM FOREST PARK  
VIRGINIA



## Finding of No Significant Impact Reestablishment of South Valley Trail



Recommended by:

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3/9/07  
Date

Approved by:

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3/22/07  
Date

## I. Introduction

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Park Service (NPS) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) which analyzed the potential impacts of a project to reestablish a section of South Valley Trail in Prince William Forest Park (PRWI). Alternative 2 was the preferred alternative as well as the Environmentally Desirable Alternative.

It involves removing a storm damaged foot bridge over South Fork Quantico Creek, rehabilitating approximately one mile of trail on the river right side and  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of access road, and establishing a new one mile length of trail on the river left side. The thirty day public review period opened on August 19, 2003 and closed on September 18, 2003. The purpose of this document is to affirm which course of action the NPS intends to follow and to record a finding of no significant impact (FONSI).

The South Valley Trail, one of the most popular hiking trails within the park, is a 9.7 mile long trail that follows South Fork Quantico Creek. The National Register Ineligible List shows that Oak Ridge Campground was built in 1963-1964, and it is believed that the trail was built after the campground was completed. A park map dated June 1953, does not show this portion of South Valley Trail. Approximately two miles south from its origin near Oak Ridge Campground, the trail crosses to the river right side of South Fork Quantico Creek and remains there until Mawavi Road, where the trail returns to the left side of the creek. The foot bridge across South Fork at the two mile mark is a large wooden foot bridge that was damaged during a February 22, 2003 flood event (Figure 3). This has been a recurring issue at the park, as the bridge has required major maintenance at least three times over the past ten years. South Valley Trail has been closed between the location of the old foot bridge and Mawavi Road since early February 2003, impacting the visitor use experience.

## II. Alternatives

The objectives of this project are:

1. Reopen South Valley Trail along its entire length
2. Minimize erosion and potential water quality effects
3. Determine the sustainability of a permanent access road
4. Develop a more sustainable section of trail
5. Ensure the safety of park staff and visitors

The objectives were developed based upon the following issues which are fully described in the Final Environmental Assessment:

- the reduction in the quality of the visitor use experience due to the trail closure
- the impact to water quality as a result of stream bank and trail erosion
- the need for an access road to make routine repairs to a foot bridge over South Fork Quantico Creek
- the sustainability of this section of South Valley Trail
- the protection of visitor and employee safety

To achieve these goals, alternatives for the South Valley Trail Reestablishment project were developed within the defined project objectives, and were based upon National Park Service and Prince William Forest Park guidelines and management objectives.

#### A. Preferred Alternative (Alternative 2)

Under this alternative the storm damaged foot bridge would be removed, the trail re-routed, and the old trail and access road rehabilitated. This would be the most sustainable alternative as it would eliminate the need to continually repair the foot bridge and stabilize the stream bank. Heavy equipment would no longer be needed, the new trail section would be safer and would not experience the same problems with erosion, and the South Valley Trail could be reopened along its length for visitor use. South Valley Trail is a single track, dirt tread, passive recreation trail that is maintained to promote a backcountry visitor experience.

#### B. Other Alternatives Considered

##### Alternative 1

This is the no action alternative. Under this alternative, the area would remain in its current condition. Individuals beginning a hike at Oak Ridge Campground will continue to be forced to double back at the location of the storm damaged foot bridge, as will those who are hiking north of Mawavi Road on South Valley Trail, as there is no way to cross South Fork Quantico Creek. It is likely that social trails would be created by visitors along the northeast side of the creek in an attempt to continue the hike. Numerous trails created haphazardly will negatively affect the vegetation resources in this area. Additionally, some individuals may attempt to cross South Fork Quantico Creek to reach the old trail on the southwest side. The depth and current of South Fork vary greatly in this area and are largely dependent upon rainfall. During particularly wet times of the year or following large storms, attempting to cross the creek may be extremely unsafe.

##### Alternative 3

Under this alternative, the storm damaged foot bridge would be replaced and the existing section of trail would continue to be used. The stream crossing (foot bridge location) and existing trail will need continual stabilization and maintenance, and the old access road will need to be developed into a permanent fire road to allow park staff access to the area. The road will need to be graded and gravel poured to minimize erosion and the creation of large ruts in the soil. The existing road cut is located on the flood plain of South Fork Quantico Creek, and it passes through vernal pools and other low-lying wet areas.

### III. Environmental Impacts

The potential environmental impacts associated with the alternatives that were considered are analyzed in Section V of the EA. The preferred alternative will help protect visitor and employee safety, improve the visitor experience, minimize impacts to water quality, and increase

the sustainability of this section of trail. The new trail will have vegetation between it and the stream channel which will drastically reduce any potential sedimentation, the stream banks at the old foot bridge location and along the existing section of trail will be stabilized, and the existing section of trail will be rehabilitated and allowed to recover. Additionally, the park will not need to maintain an access road to the site. After careful evaluation of the potential impacts of the project, the National Park Service has determined that this action will not result in impairment.

#### IV. Public Participation

The Reestablishment of South Valley Trail Draft Environmental Assessment was released for public review on August 19, 2003. A press release was sent to local media and was posted on the park's website. The document was sent to individuals on the park's mailing list, and to federal, state and local agencies for comment. In addition, it was made available on the park's website, at the visitor center, and by request. The public review period ended on September 18, 2003, and twenty-six comments were received from six Virginia state agencies, the Chesapeake Bay Local Assistance Department, and one park visitor. All comments were addressed in the Final Environmental Assessment.

#### V. Impairment of Park Resources and Values

Based upon the analysis documented in the EA, and the professional judgment of the decision-maker in accordance with the *NPS Management Policies, 2001*, it is the decision of the National Park Service to implement the preferred alternative (Alternative 2). The preferred action includes removing a storm damaged foot bridge over South Fork Quantico Creek, rehabilitating approximately one mile of trail on the river right side and  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of access road, and establishing a new one mile length of trail on the river left side. This alternative will satisfy the established project objectives with minimal impact to the park's resources.

This project does not constitute impairment to park resources and values, nor is it a violation of the NPS Organic Act. The selected alternative does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, as described in section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The project is not committing the National Park Service to specific future actions, which would constitute a significant or controversial impact. The impact of this proposal is not cumulative in nature, either in itself or in conjunction with other Federal or non-Federal projects.

#### VI. Finding of No Significant Impact

Pursuant to Section 102 (2)(C) of NEPA, the Guidelines of the Council on Environmental Quality, and the National Park Service Management Policies, this proposal does not require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement. Therefore, a Finding of No Significant Impact is warranted to implement the actions described in Alternative 2.